ST.PAUL, MINN.
M. 99,249
S.201,347
APR 15 1965

[redacted]

A JOHNSON APPOINTMENT

What Makes a Good Intelligence Chief?

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WASHINGTON—The only sensible way in which to greet the appointment of William F. Raborn as director of the Central Intelligence Agency is to hang on to one's hat and hope for the best.

It is impossible to make any more than theoretical projections as to what kind of CIA director any new man may make. As a matter of fact, it is practically impossible to say with certainty whether a man has been a good CIA director when he steps down. Objective opinions are few among insiders, and truly informed opinions almost nonexistent among outsiders.

In principle, a CIA director ought to be just as good or bad as a President causes him to be. The Central Intelligence Agency is a servant of the President. It is an extremely long extra arm, of complex mechanical structure. It is a highly-developed additional lobe of the executive brain, of subtle and intricate sensory capability. Its motor functions are supposed to be auxiliary to those of the executive brain.

On the theoretical side, the plusses and minuses of the Raborn appointment appear to come out at a net reading justifying a hope for the best.

One of the plusses is Raborn's demonstrated attainment in science and technology. As a naval officer (Raborn, 59, made vice admiral in 1960 and retired in 1963) he had a leading part in the development of the Polaris submarine missile system and distinguished himself concurrently by first class administration of the program and inspired zeal in getting production. It is not always remembered that science and technology are among the most important disciplines in the world of intelligence today.

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IT IS GENERALLY considered a plus that Richard Helms has been named by President Johnson to be Raborn's deputy. Helms, as deputy director for plans under John A. McCone, now retiring as director of the CIA, has been perhaps the second most important man in the agency.

President Johnson evidently considers it a plus that Raborn, in addition to a superb competence and a splendid record as an executive and administrator, gets along well with people, and especially with Congress. It is essential that Congress, or at least those key members directly concerned with CIA matters, trust the director. It is the director's obligation to make sure he is not made the captive of Congress as the consequence of maintaining an amicable posture toward it.

On the minus side, some regrets are expressed that a "military man" has been named head of CIA. Even if that is a fair description of a retired admiral of independent habit, the objection can be no more than theoretical. There have been some good "military men" at the top of intelligence: Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter and General Walter Bedell Smith, to name two. Reservations on this point do gain some additional weight because of potential rivalry between the CIA and the blossoming defense intelligence agency. But trouble is not guaranteed.

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IT IS POSSIBLE also to have some qualms about the party political considerations which may have influenced the choice of Raborn, who spoke for Johnson — and, rather bitingly, against Goldwater — in 1964. The functionings of the CIA should not be involved in party politics.

The most dangerous thing that can happen to the CIA is for it to gain immunity from checks and balances within the government. It is not the repository of all wisdom, ever. It needs to have a rein kept on it. Its best chance to make mistakes is when it is running too free. The responsibility for avoiding that rests with President Johnson, not with Raborn. If Mr. Johnson maintains mastery over the CIA, Raborn will probably go down as a "good" director.